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## WHAT THE TEACHER OF AMERICAN HISTORY SHOULD BE AND DO.<sup>1</sup>

UNDER the stimulus of the American Historical Association, the National Educational Association, and several of the more progressive state associations of teachers, great improvement has been marked during the past few years in the courses of historical study in American high schools and academies. From a condition where any sort of a place or no place was given for the study of history, that subject has now come to have a recognized and fairly definite position in the secondary curriculum; in most decent schools it may be said, having regard to all the conditions surrounding each school, that the study of history is beginning to come into its rightful heritage as a natural and necessary element in secondary education.

During the same period there has been a marked improvement, amounting almost to a revolution, in the quality and character of the text-books on the subject. We are now having text-books from the pens of trained historical scholars, in place of books compiled by professional literary hacks.

In two of the three prime essentials, therefore, for improved secondary teaching of history much has already been achieved though much still remains to do. In regard to the third essential, the teacher, less has been said, and while here too there has been a notable change for the better, still on the whole less has been suggested and less attained in the way of betterment.

The Committee of Seven in their report made some good general statements regarding the character of the teacher of history. The special societies and associations of history teachers in different sections and states are helping much in the uplift. But these associations are as a rule composed only of those who are already successful, at least reasonably successful, specialists in history and its teaching. The great body, the rank and file, of those who are today charged with the teaching of history in

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, March 30, 1901.

the secondary schools—and in this paper I have in mind mainly the work above the “grades”—are not yet touched directly by these active influences. The vast majority of those who are engaged in history teaching are also teaching other subjects and hardly claim or aspire to be called specialists in history. To these and to those who will follow them there must be brought a continuous pressure to better and higher work, to better and higher ideas and ideals.

What will be said in the few minutes at my disposal is based in the main on three kinds of data: (1) Information and suggestion drawn from the many books, reports, papers and discussions on the teaching of history that are the more or less common property of all; (2) a fairly intimate acquaintance for twenty years with the schools and teachers of three of the leading north central states, of which it is safe to say that they are not below the level of the great middle West in educational ideals and attainment; (3) a very direct knowledge for the past fifteen years of the products and results of secondary teaching of history, and especially of American history, in Ohio, as measured by several thousand students who have come from the schools of that state to the state university. A study of the conditions under which their previous training had been gained, and of the difference between different groups in the accuracy and extent of their knowledge of American history, and of their interest in the subject, has led irresistibly to the conclusion that the secondary teacher of American history—or, widening the statement, the secondary teacher of history—is the most important factor in the problem of improving the secondary pupil's knowledge and conception of history.

That the last twenty years have shown improvement in the type of the teacher of American history admits no doubt, but there are still scores, probably hundreds, of communities and schools in these central states where it is held that anybody can teach this subject, with the usual result that nobody does teach it, though some one goes through the form of conducting a class over, not into or through, the subject. I know that it is still true of some places in Ohio and Indiana, and I believe it still

true of some otherwise quite respectable places in Michigan, that American history teaching has about as important a place in the public schools as it had say thirty years ago in this very city in Michigan where as a grammar school lad I received during about one-half of one school year the only instruction in the subject which either the city schools gave or the University of Michigan offered below its senior year. This half-year's instruction was at the hands of one of those over-worked, undertrained, and, of course, underpaid women who welcomed the class in history not because she was full of enthusiasm and stimulating inspiration in the history of her country, but because she could sit before the class with book open, and without any appreciable mental effort easily determine by eye and ear whether the poor urchins and lassies in their parrot-like repetition of memorized paragraphs wandered from the straight and narrow path along the printed line and adown the printed page. I well remember that if fancy or imagination tempted us to embellish our narrative or to dress the naked and oft unlovely facts of history in real, live, human language we were oftentimes brought back to a sudden realization that history was stern and serious business, not to be trifled with or profaned by dilution or childish speculation.

Ours not to reason why,  
Ours but to make reply.

Looking back to that class I know that it was there that the thought first crossed my youthful mind that I should like to become a teacher of history just that I might try to teach it differently, and to see if history had to be so dead, teachers so lifeless and pupils so uninterested. Yet of that same kindly-souled, inefficient teacher, like many another since and now, it might truly be said "She hath done what she could." She was only an instance of the oft repeated and always futile attempt to fit the square peg into the round hole. Now-a-days the misfits of this sort are far less common relatively, yet so numerous as to leave it still a very live problem what the teacher of American history should be and do.

In directing attention to the personality and the activity of

the teacher of American history we may start with the premise, now fortunately not open to question, that the purpose of the study of history is not the acquisition of facts, nor does its value lie in the knowledge of facts as such ; its purpose and its value are in the power to apply and to use those facts, to trace fact back to cause, and consequence back to force, to identify and group like causes, similar facts and analogous results. American history or any other history cannot be memorized ; it must be analyzed into its causes, facts, forces, principles ; it cannot be recited, it must be discussed.

The teacher of history must then possess certain special attributes and qualities of mind, temperament, character, and training. The higher the degree in which he or she possesses these attributes, some of which seem to me innate in the successful teacher, while others are the result of training, the greater will be the measure of success.

In probably no other field of teaching do the personality of the teacher, his mental and temperamental traits and habits, count for more in his professional success—that professional success which is measured not by notoriety and promotion, but by the kind and amount of knowledge, power, and enthusiasm which the pupils have acquired as the result of the teacher's labors. So I would dwell first on the natural personality and temperament of the teacher.

1. He must be honest—morally honest, intellectually honest, politically honest. Morally honest in the sense that he will not permit himself to draw or to use or to approve any conclusions which he knows are made plausible only because he has omitted certain factors in order to make his thesis seem the stronger ; intellectually honest, in that he will compel himself to search for and use all his facts and factors even though he foresees that they may lead him remorselessly to conclusions and views and positions that he does not like to reach ; politically honest, in that he will not permit party or race or national prejudice to overshadow and dim his reason and judgment and give a bias to that which he imparts to others in the name of truth. He may, as a teacher, be an advocate only of that which has

been proved; a partisan only of that which is irrefutable. He must be of those who know no retainer except in behalf of the truth.

2. He must be either by nature or by cultivation an enthusiast, sanguine and optimistic. An intellectual and mental dyspeptic whose disease results in a chronic carping criticism has no call to teach American history. In the long run there is infinitely more good than evil in the world, and he who cannot or will not see this, who is constantly harping on the minor strings, bringing out the discords, the littleness, the meanness of life and humanity, or who has a tendency in that direction is no fit person to teach anybody anything anywhere, least of all to teach to the youth the story of our national life and progress. Faith, not skepticism, courage, not cowardice, the noble, not the mean—these are the keynotes of character we are seeking.

3. The teacher of American history must be possessed either by nature or by training of a goodly power of imagination. By this I do not mean that he may ever draw on his imagination to supply his lack of information and fact. I mean rather that power which will enable him on the basis of fact and knowledge to fill in the picture of past scenes, future conditions, or distant movements; the same kind of power which enables the archæologist with a few bones of an extinct species of animal before him to describe for others the entire animal of which these bones were once a part; the power, changing the figure, to project one's self back into the environment of which a given event is a part, to see things as they seemed to those who were then alive, and to describe them as thus viewed.

4. He must be sympathetic. The person who has not a large fund of human sympathy was not intended by an all-wise Providence to be a teacher of history, the subject which deals at every stage with human conduct, weakness, temptation, virtue, foibles, failures, triumphs. No one can rightly teach the history of his own country who cannot look at things from the standpoint of those who did the things of which that history is the story. To illustrate my meaning, while we study the history of our Civil War must we not recognize that there was a southern

side of the picture, and that viewed from that side many things look very different than from the northern side of the same picture? While we differ from our southern brother must we not see, must not our fund of human sympathy be large and deep enough to make us see and feel that the southerner was just as honest, just as sincere, just as honorable in his views and his endeavors as his northern, more successful brother? Or again, must not the teacher's power of human sympathy be strong enough to let him feel that the American loyalists during the Revolution may have been, probably were, just as sincere and honorable in their loyalty to their mother country and in their opposition to the revolutionists as were the patriots in their revolutionary efforts? We may condemn the Tories for their judgment, we must not malign them for their conduct.

In another and a different sense the power of sympathy must also exist in the teacher. He must be in sympathy with his pupils, must have that power which enables him to take interest not merely in the subject but in the learner; not the attitude which regards the pupil as a reservoir to be pumped full of unfiltered information by the teachers; but the feeling with which the parent sees the child grow under his care, or with which the farmer cultivates the field, pulling out the weeds, planting the seeds, adding the fertilizer, in order that the field may blossom into the highest productivity.

Thus far I have spoken of those natural traits which are specially essential in the personality of the teacher. I come next, and briefly, to some attributes that belong to the professional personality of the American history teacher.

1. He must be a student; one who is himself fond of study; one who knows how to study and who carries on him the impress of the student. I do not mean a recluse, a pale-faced, sad-eyed, melancholy "dig," but one whose mental habits are those of the systematic student.

2. He must be indefatigable, unwearying and unwearied in his zeal both as a student and as a teacher. However otherwise it may be with arithmetic or geometry, for example, it certainly is true of all history and not least of American history that the

teacher can never with truth say or feel that he knows the whole subject, that he needs to make no further investigation to master it. Persistent, unwearying study with the full consciousness that the further he probes the further he must keep on probing, must be the mark of the true teacher here.

3. He must be wide-awake to current events and politics; keenly alive to the history that is each day making in this broad country. The politics of today becomes the history tomorrow, and even while things are doing, in their very doing they illustrate and typify much that has occurred before. The keen-eyed live teacher sees at once the striking parallelism of events in today's doings with those of a generation ago under not dissimilar conditions. He notes, for example, how marvelously alike are the intrigues and scheming underlying the revolution and annexation of Hawaii, with the revolution and annexation of Texas a half century ago; he is quick to study and explain the Texas movement by drawing on his pupils' interest in the Hawaiian episode. Or, again, he is quick to appreciate that with the "benevolent assimilation" of the Philippines we are for the first time in our history forced to look at colonial relations from the other side of the relationship. He sees and utilizes the fact that hitherto we have sympathized only with the colonial side, whereas now we must begin to look at matters from the side of the home country also. He sees and will make his pupils see that if United States taxation of Porto Rico and the Philippines is right, then England's taxation of the thirteen colonies could not have been wholly wrong; or, reversing the statement, if England's colonial taxation was altogether wrong, then American taxation of Porto Rico and the Philippines cannot be wholly right. Thus his judgments and his pupils' ideas are rectified and clarified by these illustrations and comparisons.

4. He must be a good talker and story-teller; full of illustration, anecdote, reference, and allusion; able to put his point tersely, rapidly, clearly; ready to talk to his pupils from the fullness of his knowledge; yet not over-fond of hearing himself talk.

5. He must be well-versed in the literature and in the his-



torical geography of this country. He should know from personal visits or from careful and accurate descriptive accounts the great historic spots. He must be able to give to history its setting of habitation and place. History has been made by real men and women in a real world, not by imaginary beings in a phantom world. So the teacher must be able through the living literature of each period and the actual scenes where history was made to make it real to his pupils.

6. He must be or become the kind of teacher who can fill his pupils with zeal, enthusiasm and love for the subject ; he must strive to be that all-too-rare being, the "inspiring" teacher—the teacher who can awaken the interest of his pupils, lead them on to work for themselves, to become absorbed in the deeds, the persons, the forces, the factors of the great history of their own country. This is no doubt the hardest and most elusive of description of any of the traits of the teacher. Yet if he possesses in fair degree the traits that have been named earlier he will not fall far short of possessing this one.

The inspiring teacher is the one, not who does the work for his pupils, nor yet he who drives his pupils into work, still less is he that nondescript being often called the "interesting" teacher ; he is rather the one who by his own personality and example and precept fires them with the zeal to inquire and to work and investigate and reason for themselves. Is this a commonplace? If so, its realization in our teaching is far less easy than its utterance.

I have left myself but little time to speak of what the teacher of American history must do as a teacher and to fit himself for his work. As I apprehend it, so much, first, middle and last, depends upon what he is, that if his personality is of the right type, what he will do is largely determined in advance and follows as a matter of course. Ability to teach, to guide, to inspire, to uplift, depends more on the individual than upon his specific knowledge. In seeking the teacher of American history it seems to me quite as important, perhaps more important, to ask, "What is he?" "What kind of person is he?" than "How much does he know?" "How long has he studied?"

If both cannot be had in one person I would far rather have the man possessed of the traits I have touched upon, than the mere storehouse of knowledge which often passes for an educated being.

Let us, however, consider briefly what the teacher should do in pursuit of his profession. It is assumed in the first place that he has done what will give him a good broad foundation knowledge of his subject ; that he is a college graduate or its equivalent. Less than this the high school of the future cannot tolerate for this position. In the next place he should each year make himself master of some special period or institutional development in our history. He must do those things that will make him grow. The teacher of American history cannot stand still ; he must go either backward or forward. Last year's knowledge will not do for this year's work. Again, he must cultivate the ability to draw out his pupils, to provoke discussion, to arouse and awaken power. He must cultivate the art of questioning and of criticizing. Lastly, he must cultivate, if he needs to, the art of being modest ; cock-sureness of opinion and judgment, inerrancy of statement, knowledge and opinion, are the marks of the imperfect teacher ; modesty, frankness, carefulness, the marks of the successful one. The teacher of history who assumes or thinks himself always right is very apt to be frequently wrong.

Of method and machinery and technique of teaching American history it is not my intention to speak. Given the right kind of a man or woman, the proper foundation of knowledge and scholarly habit, and the greater part of the problem is solved. Such a man or such a woman with these habits of thought and work will compel success, and his students or her pupils will not fall short in the race.

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